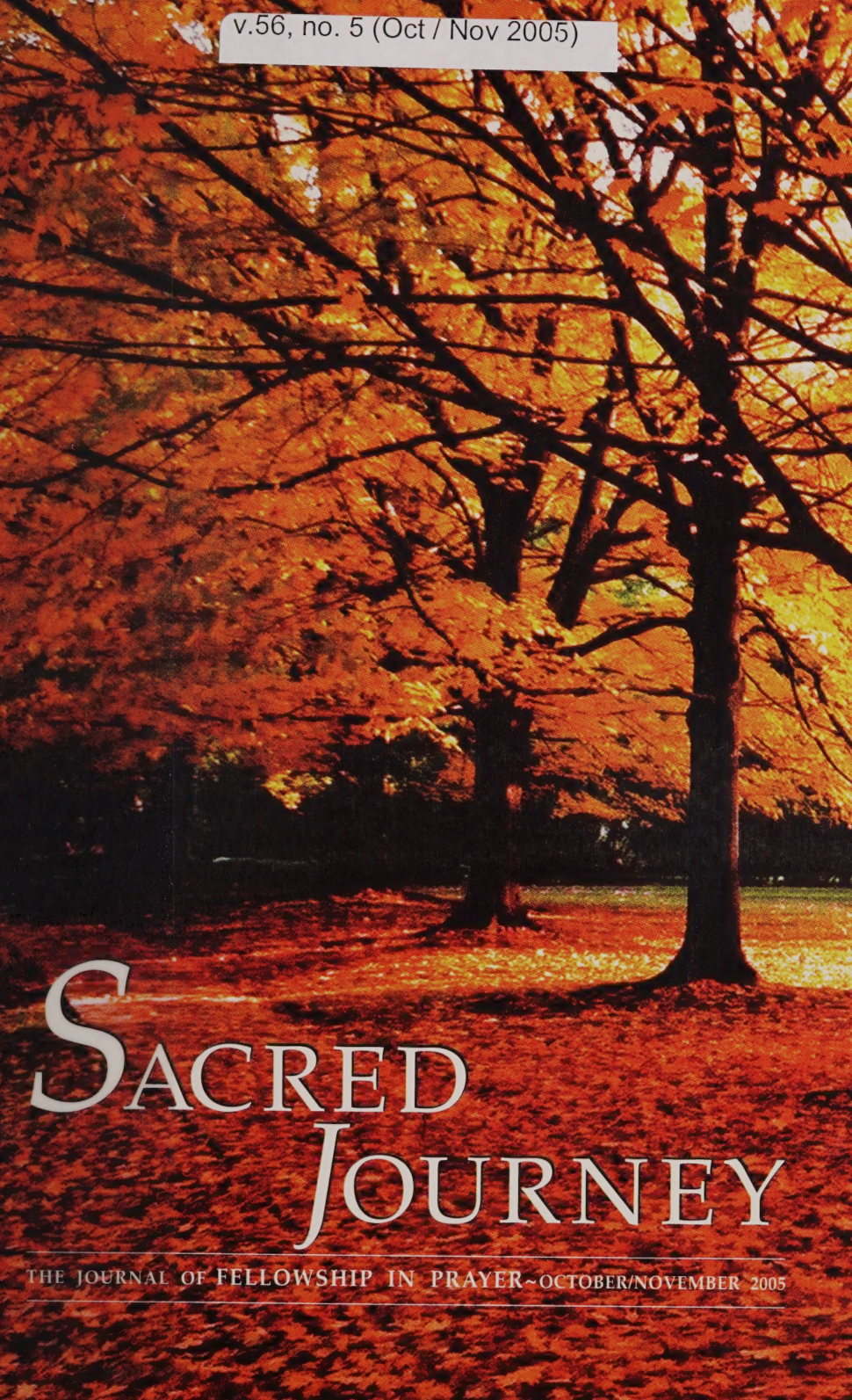


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SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER~OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2005

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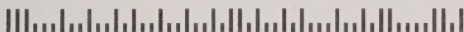
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Cover photo: Princeton in autumn, by Juan Carlos González-Nájera

Survive and Transcend



"I came to the conclusion that God does not send sickness or disease, accident or tragedy. These happen for other reasons—either from laws of nature or for reasons of human cruelty or foolishness. God sends the strength to survive and transcend the tragedy"

~ Rabbi Harold Kushner

When you receive this issue of *SACRED JOURNEY*, several weeks will have passed since Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the United States; but I write this just a week after nature wreaked havoc for millions of sentient beings. I pray that, between the time of my writing and your reading of these pages, millions more people will have stepped forward in service to those who suffer, anywhere in our world.

Our mission here at *SACRED JOURNEY*, as you'll find on the inside cover of every issue, is "to encourage and support a spiritual orientation to life, to promote the practice of prayer, meditation, and service to others, and to help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind." This mission is never-ending, and during this fall and early winter season of so many holidays in so many faith traditions, my hope is that our hearts

will open wider than we thought possible to do more good than we imagined we were able.

As we've been conveying in our last issue and again in this one, suffering is an intrinsic part of life and is acknowledged as such by the world's major faith traditions. The challenge is not to figure out how to avoid or deny suffering, but how to bear it and eventually transcend it.

In our feature story (pg. 4), Rabbi Harold Kushner says, "When people ask me, 'Where is God?' I tell them I would rather rephrase the question to 'When is God?' . . . Encountering God is not a matter of being in the right place, but of doing the right thing. God comes into our lives when we do things that make us truly human."

Robert Corin Morris (pg. 17), Episcopal priest, writes, "The facts of my life were confronting me . . . with a harsh choice: Will you face the facts as they are, or will you keep trying to escape them? . . . Can you live thankfully, enjoying what you have?"

Meredith Jordan (pg.36), counselor and spiritual director, suggests to her daughter, "We can't always change what breaks our hearts; sometimes there's nothing to do but to bear it with as much authenticity as we can. At times such as these, we wear our hearts on our sleeves, and that is an act of power and courage."

May you find inspiration as you read these stories, prayers, and poems, and may you be moved to open your heart and your mind in ever more compassionate and generous ways. You matter.

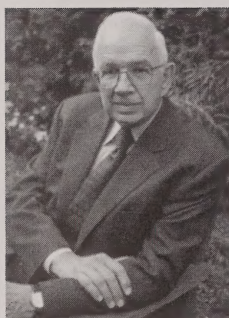
"Lord, I thank you today and every day for the ability to help others, as you have helped me."

~ Corrine De Winter (pg. 39)

OUR FEATURE

The Community of God

Harold Kushner



"Once we come to understand that we're not going to live forever, we feel the need to leave our mark on the world, so that when we are gone, people will know that we were once there. It's not mortality that frightens us, it's invisibility, the dreadful feeling that neither our living nor our dying will make a difference to the world.

Religion tries to help us conquer that fear by giving us good things to do and by reassuring us that our choices matter at the highest level. We may not be famous, but we matter to the people close to us and we matter to God."

Harold Kushner is Rabbi Laureate of Temple Israel in the Boston suburb of Natick, Massachusetts. He was born in Brooklyn, New York, graduated from Columbia University, and was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He has six honorary doctorates, has studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and has taught at Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, and the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Rabbi Kushner was the editor of the magazine Conservative Judaism for four years. In 1995, he was

honored by The Christophers, a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading messages of hope and understanding, as one of the 50 people who have made the world a better place in the last 50 years. In 1999, the national organization Religion in American Life paid tribute to him as their clergyman of the year.

Rabbi Kushner is widely known as the author of several books, the most well-known being *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, an international best-seller first published in 1981 and translated into fourteen languages. He also wrote *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*, which was awarded the Christopher Medal in 1987 for its contribution to "the exaltation of the human spirit." Other books include *When Children Ask About God*; *Who Needs God*; *To Life*; *How Good Do We Have to Be* (a 1996 best-seller); *Living a Life that Matters* (a 2001 best-seller); and *The Lord is My Shepherd* (an in-depth exploration of the 23rd psalm).

Kushner draws on scripture, modern literature, psychology, and his own 30+ years as a congregational rabbi for answers to the life questions reflected in these titles. His conclusion is that it's the simple things, like relationships with friends and family and small acts of kindness, that allow us to change others' lives in small but powerful ways, and to give our lives meaning.

The following is an essay by Rabbi Kushner titled "The Community of God."

I definitely believe in a personal God, but I believe that God is wholly other than you and me. Some forces in my life, like gravity, are impersonal; they affect all of us the same way. If you and I fall out of a window, we would fall toward the pavement, accelerating at the

same rate. Other forces—love, courage, hunger—don't affect us all the same way.

For me, God is personal in the sense that He affects every individual differently. The rabbis of the Midrash said, "God is like a mirror. The mirror never changes but everyone who looks at it sees a different face."

I grew up in a moderately religious household. My parents were very involved in our synagogue, and we went to services constantly. For me, it became part of what I did. Family came first and God was sort of an adjunct to that. God was the name we attached to the religious things we did as a family and as a community. So for me, religion begins not with a series of theological propositions, but with community. Religion is the articulation of the faith of perception, the view of purpose in life, the view of the world's holiness as articulated by a group.

Praying was as natural a part of growing up as was brushing my teeth. I learned the discipline of being grateful for all the things that happened in life—grateful for health and for the sunshine in the spring, grateful for recovery when I was sick, grateful for having parents who loved and protected me. This idea remained pretty much intact through my college education—with the usual adolescent skepticism—through my training to be a rabbi, and into my early years as a rabbi.

The crucial event in the development of my view of God came when my wife and I learned that our three-year-old son, Aaron, had a disease that would cause his death in his early teens. This contradicted everything my teachers had taught me about how the world worked, how God treated people. It forced me to abandon my idea that if I was a good and pious person,

God would protect me and my family from tragedy and let it happen only to other people. I went through a difficult period of doubt, trying to figure out what God's relationship could possibly be to my son's illness. I was very angry at God. I felt I had kept my part of an implicit bargain and God had cheated and not kept His. But I didn't want to be angry at God and I didn't want to be estranged from God. I was a person to whom religion and a sense of God's accessibility were extremely important. So I read everything I could about religion and the death of children, and in the Book of Job, especially in Archibald MacLeish's modern version, *J.B.*, I found an answer: the idea of "man forgiving God for the world's messiness and imperfection," the idea that God is not responsible for everything, but that some things in the world are beyond His power and that, as William Sloan Coffin said when his son died, "God's heart was the first to break." MacLeish's words enabled me to read the Book of Job in a totally new light, and I think that's when my awareness of the presence of God really started.

The conclusion I came to was that God does not send sickness or disease, accident or tragedy. These happen for other reasons—either from laws of nature or for reasons of human cruelty or foolishness. God sends the strength to survive and transcend the tragedy. God did not want my child to be sick and die, but God helped me face his illness with courage, and God gave me the insight to take this personal tragedy and forge it into an instrument of redemption that would help others. I learned to find God not in the tragedy, but in the capacity of the human soul to surmount and survive the tragedy. For me, that has been the source of my

everyday experience with God. In the course of my work I visit people in hospitals and I walk away not asking the question that someone else may ask —“Why does God permit cancer; why does God permit Alzheimer’s disease?” but rather “Isn’t it amazing that doctors and nurses could be so dedicated to trying to help people surmount illness?” For me, this is the presence of God in the hospital.

If we want to find God in Jewish tradition, we don’t do it by turning our backs on the world and going into mystical contemplation. Psalm 146 begins implicitly by asking a theological question: “Where is God found?” Then it says, “God is the one who sustains the fallen and feeds the hungry and brings justice to the widow and the orphan.” We find God by helping the poor, by providing homes for the homeless, by working for justice. And when we have done that, when we have done the sorts of things God stands for, we suddenly find that God has become present in our lives.

The first important element of a personal relationship with God is a sense of humility—a sense that letting God into our lives is not the result of our great achievements, but of recognizing our limitations. If we’re too full of ourselves, we leave no room for God. The Biblical definition of idol worship is not bowing down to statues, but worshipping the work of our own hands as the highest achievement and the highest source of value.

The second element is a sense of reverence, which we modern human beings have lost—a sense that there is something out there so much greater than ourselves that our human experience offers no metaphor, no analogy for it. Part of reverence is the understanding that conversation with God is not an opportunity for us to

tell Him things He would not otherwise know or to persuade Him of our merits. It's a matter of sharing our minds with Him so that His priorities and His way of seeing things enter into our minds. My teacher, Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel, said that prayer means learning to see the world from God's point of view.

A personal relationship with God enhances life. First, it enables us to accept our limitations without being frustrated by them. It assures us that problems we can't solve are not necessarily insoluble. Second, when we need it, God offers us a sense of forgiveness, a sense of cleansing from our incompleteness. We may have let Him down and disappointed Him, but we're still acceptable in His presence. When Jews gather for worship on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the first sentence of the liturgy is, "It is hereby decreed that it is permissible for sinners to be part of the congregation." It's precisely that message we're really coming for. Even if we did some things inadequately, we're still welcome to come into the sight of God. Last and perhaps most important, a personal relationship with God redeems us from the fear of death. We needn't be afraid that all our good deeds will vanish when we die.

I follow the work of Jewish theologian Martin Buber in that I believe God gives us the model of the I-Thou relationship. God never sees us in terms of what we can do for Him. He sees us in terms of how the relationship with Him can enhance our growth. And by that He teaches us how to model our relationships to our spouses, to our children, and to our neighbors as I-Thou rather than on exploitative terms. We learn to relate to people toward the goal of mutual growth, not toward the goal of exploitation, advantage, or profit.

Jews tend to be uncomfortable speaking directly about God. Because they tend to find God manifest in relationships, they are likely to talk not so much about what God has meant in their lives, but about what other human beings as incarnations of God have meant in their lives—how, for example, when they were depressed, when they were bereaved and grieving, God came to them in the incarnation of friends and neighbors who would not leave them alone. It's no fun to talk to a depressed person, and yet people found the energy and the need to do this because God was working through them. It is a Jewish affirmation that we see God in the lives and faces of all the people around us, so one of my congregants is more likely to say not that he found God in a moment of mystical insight, but that he found God when he felt terribly alone and somebody rang his doorbell and offered to sit with him and help him cry.

When people come to me and are devastated with a tragedy of some sort, the first thing I do is hug them and hold their hands, because the message I want to give is that I am there with them and that, as represented by my caring presence, God is there with them.

What I've learned is that "Why did this happen to me?" is not a question—it's a cry of pain. Persons who have suffered feel abandoned by God. For example, I have visited people dying of AIDS, and I discuss whether they feel they are dying without God—if they feel that God is punishing them for their homosexual activity or their drug use or whatever they think had given them the disease. Very often they do; and the one thing I can do is bring them some reassurance that God still cares for them. The most important message I give

is that God did not want this to happen; God does not hate them. God, too, is grieving. I do this not with my theology, but with a sense of caring, with my handholding, with my willingness to sit and listen to their stories and feel with them.

What has held Judaism together for all these centuries and what I think really holds most religions together is the sense of community, of relationships—that we are a large family rather than a belief system. In Judaism, one leaves the Jewish people not when one stops believing in Jewish theology, but only when one no longer cares about the people. At a family picnic, for example, you can have a cousin who is the opposite of you in every way, and yet you know that person is your cousin. You can't find a thing that you agree on or have in common, but you know that you are linked by something much more permanent than political or literary opinion. That's the way Jews feel about one another.

When people ask me, "Where is God?" I tell them I would rather rephrase the question to "When is God?" Encountering God is not a matter of being in the right place, but of doing the right thing. God comes into our lives when we do things that make us truly human. When we help the poor, when we speak out for justice, when we get over our exaggerated sense of our own importance, when we learn to respond with child-like awe to the sun shining in summer or to the snow falling in winter, when we get over being stuck on ourselves, we make room in our lives for God.

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Petewawa River, Algonquin Provincial Park, Canada, by Colin Ahearn

I L L U M I N A T I O N S



The wise man learns what draws God near. It is the beauty of compassion in your heart.

~ *Hafiz*

The fragrance always remains on the hand that gives the rose.

~ *Mahatma Gandhi*

Don't ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive, and then go and do that because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

~ *Harold Whitman*

I don't know who—or what—put the question. I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone—or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.

~ *Dag Hammarskjöld*

Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.

~ *Fyodor Dostoyevsky*

There is no need to run outside for better seeing. . .
Rather, abide at the center of your being, for the more
you leave it, the less you learn. Search your heart and
see. . . The way to do is to be.

~ *Lao-Tzu*

We never listen when we are eager to speak.

~ *La Rochefoucauld*

Love the moment. Flowers grow out of dark moments.
Therefore, each moment is vital. It affects the whole.
Life is a succession of such moments and to live each is
to succeed.

~ *Corita Kent*

Deep unspeakable suffering may well be called a
baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state.

~ *George Eliot*

A religious man is a person who holds God and man in
one thought at one time, at all times, who suffers harm
done to others, whose greatest passion is compassion,
whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair.

~ *Abraham Joshua Heschel*

The real spiritual progress of the aspirant is measured
by the extent to which he achieves inner tranquility.

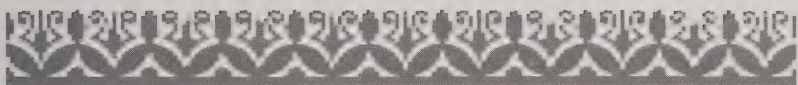
~ *Swami Sivananda*

There is nothing noble about being superior to some
other man. The nobility is in being superior to your
previous self.

~ *Hindu proverb*

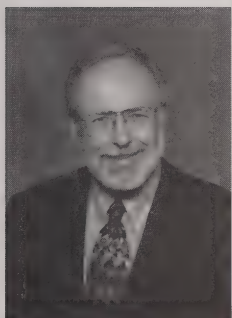


Chapel doors, by Louise Hutner



Suffering and the Courage of God

Robert Corin Morris



Oddly enough, the way out of my suffering came only when I accepted that there might be no way out of it—that I might have to live with the pain I was carrying for the rest of my life. Little did I realize the doors such acceptance might open.

Suffering can come in many forms, small and great. But how we deal with it begins with our response to whatever life presents us, from minor inconveniences to major tragedies. Life slowly taught me that the way we deal with each difficulty intensifies the suffering or opens doors to its redemption. In my case, it took great adversity to teach me how to deal with the small ones.

The suffering I faced in my mid-forties was emotional, but cripplingly real nonetheless. Behind the surface of an outwardly productive and seemingly

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successful life as a priest in a suburban Episcopal parish, a persistent low-grade pain hummed silently in the background of my soul, the bitter fruit of a childhood of emotional scarring. My father's violent temper and my mother's alternating episodes of intense rage and expressive love had left deeper scars on my psyche than I had previously realized. I began to notice how much I was using my otherwise worthy activities as a pastor, husband, colleague, and friend—preaching, teaching, team projects, spiritual practice, interesting conversations, heartwarming films, good books, even friendship and marriage themselves—as ways to escape this pain. Every time I really came “home” to myself, there it was, quietly throbbing, sending me out once again to find some new diversion from the discomfort. Not only that, but as my awareness of this background pain surfaced, I noticed how often it flared when I felt personally wounded by someone. What I had identified as periods of wanting to withdraw and close myself down now began painting themselves in more vivid colors as occasions when some outer event hit the raw wound of past emotional abuse, causing an overreaction to otherwise minor incidents. Each new venture gave me a soothing thrill of pleasure, but did little to heal the pain within.

This was all the more discouraging because I had already spent the decade of my thirties finding some relief from my own bipolar depressive illness (a legacy from my mother's genes, and the unsuspected cause of her alternating moods). That biologically-based disease had been like a roller coaster, sending me reeling from the depths to the heights at least once a year. I had understood this as a personal,

psychological flaw until receiving proper diagnosis and treatment. I'll discuss my recovery from that disease later on in this book (*see author's bio, pg. 17*), but for now it suffices to say that through the decade of the struggle I had hoped emotional turmoil would find a simple, peaceful resolution and my suffering would cease. Now, it seemed, the gradual but real remission of the bipolar depression through therapy and medicine had merely cleared the ground for this deeper, underlying distress to emerge. I was now presented with a real psychological problem that had been hiding behind the disease.

I felt inwardly trapped. I had tried every "fix" available. Sadly, it seemed, I had run out of options. Maybe I would have to live with this hum of pain for the rest of my life. Would I do that? Could I do that?

The facts of my life were confronting me, not for the first time, with a harsh choice: Will you face the facts as they are, or will you keep trying to escape them? Do you have the courage to carry this pain to the grave, if need be, or will you spend your time mourning a healing that hasn't happened? Is the already significant good in your life satisfying enough to accept this persistent pain as one part of the total package? Can you live thankfully, enjoying what you have?

Being out of alternatives, this seemed an offer I couldn't refuse, so I said to myself, to life, and to God, "Okay, okay, okay. If that's the choice, I choose life, as it is, even though some part of me is still in the prison of this pain." Although I had made this choice, I found this question still dangling: How could I accept this pain without remaining its victim? Where could I find the courage to make this possible?

Paradoxically, it is often our unwillingness to accept the way things are that blocks any possibility of future change. Having accepted that I might live with this pain forever, I was soon invited to a fresh exploration of possibilities.

I had a dream: Trapped in a prison cell, I gripped the bars, looking into the mournful eyes of an abused, suffering Christ who stood just outside my cage. This was an absolutely stereotypical, stained-glass image of Jesus as archetypal victim: crown of thorns, red robe, patient, sad and long-suffering countenance.

My first response was to recoil. I was in the midst of rebellion against my own particular childhood image of Christ, which was based on a dark strain of Christian piety that sees suffering as a good thing, in and of itself. The abused child in me had identified with Jesus as the “good kid” who accepts his abuse patiently and passively. Jesus was the best kid ever. No wonder the bullies went after him, the archetypal scapegoat, the perfect victim. The particular strain of fundamentalism in which I was raised emphasized, perversely, that the greater the suffering, the greater the good for all—like the child in an abusive family, unconsciously targeted as the scapegoat, whose suffering benefits those who can unload their frustrations on him, rather than having to bear their own emotional turmoil. This had been the original, albeit unwitting, framework of meaning for my own suffering.

Something healthy in me had long since rejected this version of Jesus, finding in Scripture a more robust and life-giving person. So why was this abject figure standing in front of my prison cell? “Get me out of here,” I begged. The mournful face broke into a kindly

smile, and the eyes suddenly revealed a surprisingly strong resilience—a love that had courageously endured deep suffering, yet had not been undone by it. “The cell door isn’t really locked,” he said. “Go on, push it open. You can leave if you want to.” And then he disappeared. My dream self pushed on the cell door. It opened. I stood in the cell, astonished, wondering what to do next as I awoke.

No miracle cure came along with this dream, but I knew it was an invitation to learn how to deal with my suffering differently. The subtle transformation of Christ’s face from the sadness of suffering to the strength of courageous love invited me to see him in a new way. Somehow, the way out of the prison had to do with learning to see that suffering differently. What was Jesus’ own way of dealing with suffering?

I can’t claim to have penetrated the heart of God on this matter, but as I’ll soon relate, I came to see the suffering Christ not as a helpless victim but as a subtle victor, courageously engaged in a deep struggle against the power of any victimizing force to undo us. His suffering is not borne passively, but embraced actively by a love and life bigger than any suffering—God’s own eternally springing life, manifest in Christ, available to all, whether the external forms of adversity change or not. As I came to see this courageous Christ in a fresh light, I began both to realize and believe that all our sufferings are carried in an even bigger and stronger courage—God’s own courageous love. This vast life, from which we cannot be separated, enters into all the difficulties creatures face with abundant grace to help us overcome all the power that would trap us in a prison house of fear, resignation, and helplessness.

Astonished at the very idea that my own courage could be rooted in a courage as deep as God's—an idea we will explore in more depth in the next chapter—I was able to embrace my inward hum of pain instead of running from it, working through it step by step in a healing process that has gone further than I initially dared to imagine. While some inner scar tissue can be jolted into a dull hurting, the persistent low hum has long since departed.

This book comes out of many years of discovery and transformation that made me more compassionate with myself and those to whom I minister, as we all seek the courage to face adversity in ways that lessen, rather than add to, the suffering of the world. Everything I've written comes not only from what I learned in my own experience, but even more from hearing the stories of how other people deal courageously with their own difficulties. All this has changed the way I approach even minor annoyances. I hope the witness of these lives, and my own personal insights, may offer some help in opening the seemingly locked doors in others' lives.



Chapel side with outdoor pulpit, by Louise Hutner

P O E T R Y



Across the Threshold

Alexander Levering Kern

Outside the doors of St. Anthony's shrine
two bodies sit, broken yet loved,
competing with pigeons
for best seats on the street.

The downtown Boston workers shuffle past
for Mass, as Franciscans shepherd their faithful
flock with holy precision. Each hour the body
is taken, blessed, broken, and given as our own.

I find my place on the sidewalk outside,
sitting stiffly with homeless folks,
my bag filled with sandwiches, sweets,
and socks, my mouth with words
of concern. It's my street outreach week,
and the old woman smiles
—blue eyes glistening in the cold light—
as she makes me welcome, reports on life,
then suddenly spews racist bile into the air.
My heart dodges, then plumbs for deeper love.

A few feet away, the man in fatigues bleeds
olive drab, clutching my sandwich and coffee
in silent communion, his mind returning

from the acrid jungles to frozen streets.
Thanks man, he says, but can you give me some space?
You're bad for business. I move, as he jingles his jar.

The song rises inside, and soon we turn
ever so slightly toward the door
where Christ stands in living stone,
remembering his people, his promise of peace.
The kingdom shall come

and for a moment it seems that Francis dances
across the threshold, gripping stones in scarlet hands,
a builder inviting the lost to labor, the hungry to feast.
Come in! is his joyful cry to the poor,
come in, and be fed.
To the rich man he calls, *Come out!*
and you too shall be fed!
Come in, and come out:
a song that lingers, long after doors close,
streets empty, and a crescent sliver rises
to illumine the night.

Alexander Levering Kern is a poet, a Quaker, a theological educator, and a peace activist deeply involved in nurturing contemplative spirituality, and interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. He teaches practical theology and counsels graduate students at Andover Newton Theological School in Massachusetts where he lives with his wife Rebecca and son Elias.

Lifted—for Elise

Nancy Compton Williams

You let us rest,
one by one,
on the branches
of your tree.
Secured by
a tender stem,
you anchor us
to strength and roots
larger than ourselves.
Your shelter
holds us high
above the shadows
where we can learn
a new life,
lifted on
the breath of God.

Nancy Compton Williams is a widely published poet, a teacher of poetry, and currently serves as a coeditor of Poem. A book of her poems, Stillness Walks on Water, was published by Mt. Charron Books in 2002.

Autumn Rain

Tsultrim Dorjee

The light darkens in the sky over the hills
The ferns turn yellow And the air is crisp

A few gray clouds And the moon is hidden
As the wind blows the rain over the meadow

I've never seen the rain like this
All that passes, passes from here

Autumn is beautiful The wind rustles
the wet leaves and the night grows longer

Tsultrim Dorjee is a published poet, freelance journalist, and Buddhist practitioner living in Keene, New Hampshire. While primarily a Buddhist, he is deeply inspired by and connected to Islam and Christianity.

My Symphony

William Henry Channing

To live content with small means;
to seek elegance rather than luxury,
and refinement rather than fashion;
to be worthy, not respectable, and
wealthy, not, rich; to listen to stars
and birds, babes and sages, with
open heart; to study hard; to think
quietly, act frankly, talk gently,
await occasions, hurry never;
in a word, to let the spiritual,
unbidden and unconscious,
grow up through the common—
this is my symphony.

William Henry Channing (1810-1884) was the nephew of the renowned Unitarian clergyman, William Ellery Channing. William Henry's father died shortly after his birth, and he was raised by his mother. After attending Boston Latin School and Harvard College (class of 1829), Channing entered Harvard Divinity School, embarking on a long and successful career as a reform-minded minister and Transcendentalist. According to his biographer in the Dictionary of American Biography, Channing "labored much in social reforms, and [was] a zealous and eloquent preacher."

The Guest House

Rumi

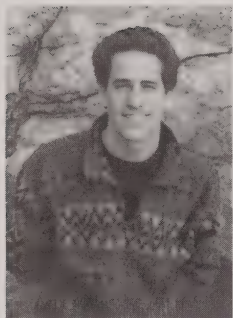
This being human is a guest house
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Jalaluddin Rumi was a thirteenth-century Sufi mystic and poet, writing in the area now known as Afghanistan. Rumi is widely read, both in the Islamic world and in the West, for much the same reasons he was revered during his life: for his excellence as a poet; for his rare ability to empathize with humans, animals and plants; and for his flawless moral center and ability to direct others towards good conduct and union with Allah. For Islamic readers, Rumi remains an important commentator on the Koran and a brilliant exponent of Sufi philosophy, the strain of Islam that stresses direct and ecstatic communion with Allah.



Doubling Up

Dan Joseph



Years ago, I set off on a cross-country trip with a friend. Our plan was to camp and hike our way through the national parks of the western states. I had been living in an east coast city for the previous few years, and was starved for natural beauty. And so, as we drove into Yosemite to begin our tour, I was riveted. The mountains were breathtaking. The alpine fields were touching. I felt like a thirsty man who had stumbled into an oasis—there was beauty everywhere.

My friend and I backpacked for a few days along the waterfalls of Tuolumne Meadows. The landscape was magnificent. Then we moved on to Utah, and moonlit hikes among the spires of Bryce. We waded knee-deep in water up the canyons of Zion. We strolled through the tundra of the Rockies.

It was all stunning. Mountains, waterfalls, flowers—indescribable beauty. There were moments when I felt profoundly close to God. And that, of course, was why I really went to those places—to feel that sense of spiritual connection. To feel that transcendence.

Dan Joseph is the author of Inner Healing and Inspired by Miracles, two books inspired by A Course in Miracles. Please visit him online at www.DanJoseph.com and try his free monthly newsletter.

But as the weeks passed, a curious thing happened. It began to be more difficult to get my “high.” These mountains were great, of course, but they weren’t much different than the ones from last week. That field was beautiful, but so were the others. I began to chase more dramatic scenery, looking for a spiritual lift. Eventually I got to a point where I just couldn’t make it happen. I did my best to extract a spiritual high from what I was seeing—the mountains, the fields—but I just couldn’t do it. It was discouraging. Shortly thereafter, we ended the trip and I went back to my city life. It took me years before I understood what had happened.

On that trip, I fell into a common trap. I believed that I was getting my spiritual lift from something external—the mountains, the streams. This began a cycle of chasing better mountains, better streams. In fact, though, my “high” was coming not from what I was getting from the mountains, but from what I was giving to them.

On the first day of my trip, I looked out at those mountains and said—so quickly I didn’t realize it—“My goodness, you are profoundly beautiful. I love you.” I was then immediately swept up in the joy of that thought. It seemed like the mountains were making me feel joyful. But it was really my love for the mountains that lifted me up.

If I had seen this, I could have kept the flow going. I could have entered each new park saying, “Ah, what wonderful things can I extend love to today?” But instead, I fell into the trap of trying to extract from externals. “I need better mountains,” I thought, “bigger ones, something more dramatic.” As I did that, the outflow of my appreciation was blocked—and

thus, the sense of transcendence became harder and harder to reach.

I believe we can choose—at any time, with any thing—to extend copious amounts of love and appreciation, and we will be instantly lifted up by our choice. We are in control of the outflow. There is nothing that prevents us from exercising our right to give. I didn't realize this on my cross-country trip. I thought that I could only embrace the most dramatic, towering mountains, or the most delicate, flower-sprinkled fields. But the fact is that I could have chosen a pebble on the path and enfolded it in waves of love and appreciation, and thus been lifted up.

There is a line from *A Course in Miracles* that says that as we allow our hearts to embrace what we see,

“The smallest leaf becomes a thing of wonder,
and a blade of grass a sign of God's perfection.”

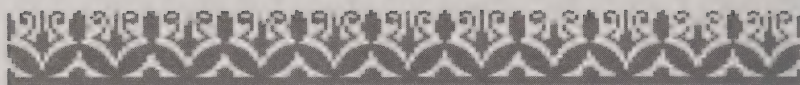
The key is to realize that the power lies within us. We don't need to chase beauty, love, and transcendence; instead, we experience them by giving.

I sometimes engage in a practice that I call “doubling up.” If I feel deprived of something—kindness, for example—I decide how much of that I'd like. Then I try to give twice that to the people in my life. Usually my outflow of kindness creates an inflow of kindness, and sure enough, I begin to feel it. Although there may be some internal resistance at first, I find that this practice always produces positive results.

The lesson that we will receive what we give is an empowering one. Instead of spending our time chasing after things, we can spend our time giving, and thus experiencing them. The power is in our hands, because we are always free to give.



Mountaintop view, by Louise Huthner



Look Up Meredith Jordan



*What occurs around you
and within you
reflects your own mind
and shows you the
dream you are weaving.*

~ Venerable Dyhani Ywahoo

That particular Saturday had been a difficult one for me. It culminated with a deep conversation with my daughter, who was beginning to terminate her work with the children she had been seeing as clients for two years in her social work graduate school program. She had formed significant bonds with each child, and this period of closure was painful for Sarah and the children. In her anguish, she asked: “Mom, does the joy in life ever balance out the suffering?”

For more than twenty-five years, Meredith Jordan has worked with adults and children embarked on a spiritual journey to develop or deepen a personal relationship with the Mystery many people call God. She is co-founder of Rogers McKay (a non-profit, multifaith educational organization) and the author of Embracing the Mystery: The Sacred Unfolding in Ordinary People and Everyday Lives, available at bookstores nationwide and through www.amazon.com. Ms. Jordan divides her professional counseling and spiritual direction practice between Maine and the West Coast of Florida. To learn more visit www.rogersmckay.org.

That question is almost impossible for an honest person to try to answer, and I was too drained from my own concerns to try. I wanted to tell her that yes, there is often great joy to be had throughout the living of our lives . . . and truly there is.

But that was not so for me—or for her—on the day she asked the question. Instead of saying something that fell short of the truth, I talked with her about what it means for us to help each other “bear the unbearable.” I suggested, sadly, that bearing the unbearable is sometimes the best we can do.

Then I told her that earlier that morning I’d looked out my living room window to see the first red-tailed hawk of the season floating high above the trees at the end of the road. The hawk looped in wider and wider circles, swooping into the high branches of the trees and then diving back into the open skies. The sunlight fell upon the hawk in just such a way that the burnished red of its wing and tail feathers glowed like embers of a dying fire.

I watched as my neighbors hurried in and out of their homes, their cars, off to do errands, back from their errands, never looking up to see the miracle flying high in the sky over their heads. I ventured to guess I was the only person who saw the hawk in the fifteen minutes or so it circled our neighborhood. I was the one who noticed the hawk lift high onto currents of air far above the trees, glide majestically along those currents for a last breath-taking moment, and silently depart on the next leg of its long migratory journey.

That afternoon, as both of us reeled with exhaustion and sorrow, I told this story to Sarah and said: “At times, something magical and mysterious like this is enough

to ease the suffering for just a little while. It's sometimes sufficient to remind us that beauty is all around us, even in the midst of the worst anguish." We can't always change what breaks our hearts; sometimes there's nothing to do but to bear it with as much authenticity as we can. At times such as these, we wear our hearts on our sleeves, and that is an act of power and courage. An act of faithfulness to life and to love. If Sarah did anything less than bear the unbearable in quiet anguish, she'd have diminished the truth of her love for the children who revealed their stories to her waiting heart and changed her in the process. Her broken heart was evidence something meaningful had transpired between them. She was weaving the dream of love.

I tell myself, as I recount the story to you now, to remember that it's good to look up when I'm feeling most down. One never knows what wild and beautiful moment is waiting to be noticed.



Canoeing in Verendrie Provincial Park, Canada, by Colin Ahearn

P R A Y E R S



Behold, I Knock

John Constantine Mastor

Please dine with me
and I with You.
A spirit-filled
communion washes
away my solitude.
My affliction departs
through the grace
of Your loving arms.

The Grace of God

Corrine De Winter

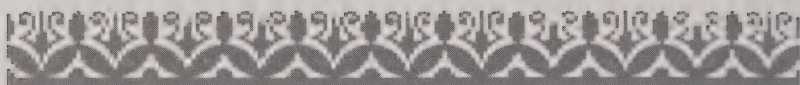
You had the face
of a stranger that day.
Gently you spoke
and wiped the tears
from my face.
I did not know you,
nor what I was capable of.
Until tragedy
I did not know
That for my whole life
You had been
waiting for me.

Heartsong

Corrine De Winter

Lord, I thank you today
and every day
for the ability to help others,
as you have helped me.
I know that when I become lost
on this great highway that is life,
I have only to hold out my hands
in pure faith to feel you there.
When I feel so very alone
on dark days I realize that
it is only because I have refused
to let in the light.
When I am unforgiving of myself
and the mistakes I have made,
it is only because
I have not listened to you,
nor the angels you have sent
to my side, singing in my heart.
But when I do, Lord,
the song is sweet
and the melody is strong,
and the message is clear:
"Forgive Yourself."

Corrine De Winter is the author of seven collections of verse. Her work has appeared in hundreds of journals and books including Comfort Prayers; Bless the Day; and The Language of Prayer. She lives in western Massachusetts.



Addicted to Stones

Susan Gregg-Schroeder



When my daughter was studying for a year in England, I made a winter-time visit to see her. We were on a student budget and avoided most of the tourist attractions. Our preferred modes of transportation included the Underground, the train, or the infamous Badger Bus Line. My one request was to see Stonehenge, that mysterious and ancient configuration of stones. It was not an easy trip in the dead of winter with washed-out train tracks and unpredictable bus schedules; but we managed to make it there, arriving quite late one day.

To our delight, virtually no one was there. The area was free of “wannabee” Druids and street vendors. It was freezing cold, and the wind cut through our southern California layers of clothing. Braving the elements, we wrapped scarves tightly around our heads and ventured through the tunnel and up the path to Stonehenge.

We stood there in awe and silence, taking in the sight of these massive stones. I don’t know what drew

Susan Gregg-Schroeder is Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries for the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church, and author of In the Shadow of God’s Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression. Please visit her online at www.mentalhealthministries.net.

me to this place, but since no one knows for certain what this strange circle of rough-hewn stones signifies, I sensed I was in good company.

To appreciate this bleak place, one must have a yearning for mystery or an "addiction to stones," as M. Scott Peck says in his book, *In Search of Stones*. Peck says, "To have a full-blown taste for mystery one must delight both in solving mysteries and in not solving them; in finding explanations for things and in living with things for which there currently is no explanation and which may be forever beyond explanation." One can only wonder why these ancient peoples worked together to roll these rocks to this expansive plain, some stones coming from 130 miles away in Wales.

Many theories have been proposed as to the purpose and meaning of this place. There is evidence that it was some sort of a spiritual center with priests carrying out their various duties. Some have speculated that the configuration of rocks was somehow linked to the yearly cycle of the sun.

Silently standing before those magnificent stones became a personal epiphany. I had a sense of connectedness with these ancient people, with myself, with God, and with the earth. Then it dawned on me. We, the children of the Enlightenment, have lived with disintegration and with the conflicting separation of faith and reason for over 300 years. We have relegated religion and science to separate, isolated spheres. What I experienced on that frigid plain was the interrelatedness of faith and reason, of religion and science, of the sacred and the profane. I experienced the underlying unity in all things and I too became addicted to stones.

BOOK REVIEWS



Please enjoy these publishers' reviews of books that have recently come across our desk. We offer you several more than usual during this fall and early winter season of many holidays in various faith traditions.

The Secret Life of God: Discovering the Divine Within You

by Rabbi David Aaron

Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2004

www.shambhala.com, 888-424-2329 or 617-424-0030

How much does our perception of God really matter? Many of us aren't conscious of our image of a "higher power." For some of us, that unspoken image is a judgmental parent or an exacting old man in the sky. For others, God is an imaginary friend who is there to fix problems after we create them.

Rabbi David Aaron, an inspiring and gentle guide, can help you discover a mature new understanding of God and lead you to discover the wellspring of Divinity within you. By drawing on teachings of Kabbalah that were secret for millennia, he helps you to reclaim the power you've given away to negative images of God or passive images of yourself. These mystical secrets of Judaism can offer reassuring guidance, meaning, and purpose to the lives of people of all faiths.

Rabbi Aaron guides you to: awaken to your life's deepest purpose; know that you matter and that

everything you feel and do is important to God; delight in a deeper connection to your true inner self, God, and others; learn to experience God's infinite love for you; rise to new heights, cope with challenges, and make courageous choices; achieve true peace of mind and freedom from anxiety.

Rabbi Aaron shares these profound ancient teachings in simple, everyday language with a touch of wit and humor. His book is rich in personal stories and anecdotes from daily life that help us to tap into the transformational power hidden within us, and that illuminate the surprising paradoxes of spiritual growth. When we awaken to the experience of a personal connection with God, we are then able to receive God's love unconditionally and discover our ultimate identity, divine purpose, and true happiness.

Sacred Refuge: Why and How to Make a Retreat
by Thomas Santa

Ave Maria Press, May 2005

www.avemariapress.com, 800-282-1865 x1

"Sacred Refuge is to be commended for several reasons: it is clear, specific, encouraging and ecumenical. Those interested in returning to their spiritual center, (re)learning the methods of prayer, retreating in solitude, experiencing awareness and a deeper contact with God—and how and where to begin doing all that—will find no better guide than this book."

~ Patricia Kossman, Lit. Editor, America Magazine

Sacred Refuge is your guide for that process known as making a retreat. Noted retreat director Thomas

Santa is both practical and spiritual. With a rich understanding of the spiritual life, he makes clear the valuable help that retreats provide.

Drawing on his wealth of experience, Santa answers questions such as: Where can I go on retreat? What should I look for in a retreat? What are realistic goals and expectations to have for the retreat? What is the role of the retreat director? Although rooted in the Catholic tradition, this book transcends boundaries to be useful both to other Christians and to anyone who wants to know more about retreats. Wherever you may be on your spiritual journey, this book is an invaluable aid in tapping into the power of the retreat experience, and through that, into God.

The Sacred Art of Fasting: Preparing to Practice
by Thomas Ryan, CSP

Skylight Paths Publishing, 2005

www.skylightpaths.com

800-962-4544 or 802-457-4000

“Fasting as a religious act increases our sensitivity to that mystery always and everywhere present to us. . . It is a discipline of self-restraint, a ritual of purification, and a sanctuary for offerings of atonement. It is . . . a compass for the spiritually lost, and inner nourishment for the spiritually hungry.”

Though fasting is practiced in some form by nearly every faith tradition throughout the world, it is often seen as scary or something only for monastic life. But fasting doesn't have to be intimidating. This book helps you to explore the practical approaches, spiritual motivations, and physical benefits of this ancient practice by looking at the ways it is

observed in several faith traditions. It offers personal reflections, helpful advice, and encouragement from people who practice fasting.

Thomas Ryan, CSP is a Catholic priest and member of the Paulist Fathers. He coordinates ecumenical and interreligious relations for the Paulist community in the United States and Canada. He is the author of nine books. He lives in New York City.

Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening **by Kay Lindahl**

SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2003

www.skylightpaths.com

800-962-4544 or 802-457-4000

This is a companion volume to Lindahl's first book, *The Sacred Art of Listening*, which provided 40 short, distinct entry points into the realm of real listening. In her new book, Lindahl explores the nature and use of silence, reflection, and divine presence as foundational qualities of listening and shows how we can apply these in daily life. This workshop-in-a-book examines the varied ways we are called to deep listening, including contemplative listening, reflective listening, heart listening, listening in groups, and more.

Each chapter offers techniques to practice listening, and the "Daily Practices" section is filled with ways to restore loving-kindness to language. She also has clear directions for conversational etiquette among people of different faiths, viewpoints, or life experiences.

Kay Lindahl is the founder of the Listening Center in Laguna Niguel, California. She teaches the sacred art of listening to a variety of groups, including religious leaders,

spiritual seekers, healthcare professionals, and business people, all over the world.

Episcopal Life magazine says, “Lindahl is passionate about helping people communicate their authentic hearts to each other. If these guidelines were followed, we would live in a transformed world.”

Joy, No Matter What:

Make 3 Simple Choices to Access Your Inner Joy by Carolyn Hobbs

Conari Press, March 2005

www.redwheelweiser.com, 800-423-7087

“Over the years, I saw that our own beliefs, fears, and habitual reactions to life limit our joy much more than any spouse, boss, or devastating life experience. I started teaching my clients to carry two questions with them in their daily lives: ‘Am I feeling joy now? If not, how am I holding my joy away?’ . . . Over time, my three-step approach evolved: 1) say yes to what is; 2) witness your thoughts, feelings, and reactions; and 3) respond differently, with kindness and compassion. By seeing our old habits clearly and by taking full responsibility for how we respond, we become able to hold all of life’s gifts in joy.”

Joy, No Matter What shows that joy is not something only available to a select few. We all have joy at our core, and no matter what is going on in our lives, we can uncover it and bring it into the light of our everyday lives.

The author presents brief essays on everyday situations and habits we all fall into—mind, fear, feeling, and belief habits—with information on what they truly are, and exercises that help us to change them.

Carolyn Hobbs is a licensed marriage and family therapist, and a member of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology and the Association for Humanistic Psychology. She has taught at Naropa Institute and Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

The Heron Dance Book of Love and Gratitude

Ann O'Shaughnessy, Editor

Rod MacIver, Watercolors

Heron Dance Press © 2005

www.herondance.org, 888-304-3766

"I know now that Love is a worthy purpose. If I could talk to my 18-year old self, this is what I would tell her: 'Live in love by availing yourself to beauty when it comes across your path; serve something greater than yourself; tell your truth to yourself over and over; surrender your old stories of fear and self-consciousness so that you can make the big space in your heart for Love to flow. Pour your heart into what you love. This is your purpose—don't let anyone or anything dissuade you.'" (pg. 3)

Living with love and gratitude is at the center of the well-lived life. *Heron Dance* celebrates the open heart and the beauty and mystery that surround us with this book of poetry, and book and interview excerpts. Included are 48 watercolors by Rod MacIver and selections from the written works of Helen Keller, Rachel Naomi Remen, Katharine Hepburn, Albert Einstein, Pablo Casals, Joseph Campbell, Dostoevsky, and Henry Miller, among many others. Introduction by *Heron Dance* editor Ann O'Shaughnessy.

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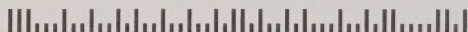
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